

## **This is Why Keeping Employees Engaged is Pivotal**

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Engaged people at work are positive and even excited about their jobs, they are prepared to go above and beyond to get the work done to the best of their ability. According to Towers Perrin (2007), the term employee engagement refers to ‘the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, beyond the minimum to get the job done, in the form of extra time, brainpower or energy’.

### **Organizational Commitment**

Engagement and organizational commitment are two important concepts affecting work performance, the attraction and retention of employees. The Conference Board in the United States (2006) defines engagement as ‘a heightened connection that an employee feels for his or her organization’. They are closely linked – high organizational commitment can increase engagement and high engagement can increase commitment. People can be engaged with their work even when they are not committed to the organization except in so far as it allows them to use and develop their skills.

### **How important is Engagement?**

Engagement is at the core of the employment relationship. It is about what people do and how they behave in their roles and what makes them act in ways that further the achievement of the objectives of both the organization and themselves. Research by Watkin (2002) found that there were significant differences in value-added discretionary performance between ‘superior’ and ‘standard’ performers. The difference in low-complexity jobs was 19%, in moderate-complexity jobs 32% and high-complexity jobs 48%.

### **What Influences Engagement?**

Research by Incomes Data Services (2007) has identified two elements that have to be present if genuine engagement is to exist. The first is the rational aspect, which relates to employees’ understanding of their role, where it fits in the wider organization and how it aligns with business objectives. The second is the emotional aspect, which has to do with how people feel about the organization, whether their work gives them a sense of personal accomplishment and how they relate to their manager. These two overall aspects can be analysed into several factors that influence levels of engagement.

The work itself can create job satisfaction leading to intrinsic motivation and increased engagement. The factors involved are interesting and challenging work, responsibility, autonomy, scope to use and develop skills and abilities, the availability of the resources required to carry out the work, and opportunities for advancement.

The work environment- An enabling, supportive and inspirational work environment creates experiences

that impact on engagement by influencing how people regard their Employee engagement strategy roles and carry them out. An enabling environment will create the conditions that encourage high-performance and effective discretionary behaviour. These include work processes, equipment and facilities, and the physical conditions in which people work. A supportive environment will be one in which proper attention is paid to achieving a satisfactory work-life balance, emotional demands are not excessive, attention is paid to providing healthy and safe working conditions, job security is a major consideration and personal growth needs are taken into consideration.

An inspirational environment will be where what John Purcell and his colleagues refer to as ‘the big idea’ is present – the organization has a clear vision and a set of integrated values that are ‘embedded, collective, measured and managed’. The environment is affected by the organization’s climate, which, as defined by French et al (1985), is ‘the relatively persistent set of perceptions held by organization members concerning the characteristics and quality of organizational culture’. It is also directly influenced by its work and HR practices.

As Purcell (2001) indicates, the way HR practices are experienced by employees is affected by organizational values and operational strategies, such as staffing policies or hours of work, as well as the way they are implemented. He also emphasizes that work climate and the experience of actually doing the job all influence the way employees experience the work environment. This has an important effect on how they react to HR and reward practices and how these influence organizational outcomes. Employees react in several different ways to practices in their organization, and this affects the extent to which they want to learn more and are committed and satisfied with their jobs. This, in turn, influences engagement – how well they do their jobs and whether they are prepared to contribute discretionary effort.

Leadership the degree to which jobs encourage engagement and positive discretionary behaviour very much depends upon how job holders are led and managed. Managers and team leaders often have considerable discretion on how jobs are designed, how they allocate work and how much they delegate and provide autonomy. They can spell out the significance of the work people do. They can allow them to achieve and develop, and provide feedback that recognizes their contribution.

As Ed Lawler indicated it in 2003, ‘People enjoy learning – there’s no doubt about it – and it touches on an important “treat people right” principle for both organizations and people: the value of continuous, ongoing training and development.’ Learning is a satisfying and rewarding experience and makes a significant contribution to intrinsic motivation.

Opportunities to contribute to Engagement is enhanced if employees have a voice that is listened to. This enables them to feed their ideas and views upwards and feel that they are contributing.

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